

Classic Poetry Series

George A. Mackenzie
- poems -

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George A. Mackenzie(20 July 1849-1899)

George Allan Mackenzie was a Canadian poet who worked as a lawyer.

Life

Mackenzie was born in Toronto, the oldest son of Catherine Eliza and Rev. John George Delhoste Mackenzie. His father was the first master of Trinity College, University of Toronto. As a boy he enlisted in the Canadian militia, and took part in the Battle of Ridgeway. In 1866 he entered Trinity College, where he graduated with first-class honors and was awarded the Prince of Wales Prize. He was called to the Bar in 1873. He joined the law firm of Jones Bros., which became "Jones Bros. and Mackenzie," and later "Jones, Mackenzie, and Leonard." He retired in 1900 due to failing health.

In 1886 he married Elle Therese Demuth of Philadelphia. The couple had one son (who was killed in action in World War I) and one daughter. Elle Mackenzie died in 1899.

His poems were published in 1914, in *In That New World Which is the Old*. He moved to England in 1915.

Writing

J.D. Logan: "Mr. Mackenzie belongs to that rare company of cultured, refined, modest minds who regard poetry as dainty messages of the spirit for appreciation by souls akin to themselves.... He is, above all things, an artist in versification. Technically viewed his sonnets are superb. They are much more than this in beauty of thought and spiritual appeal.... 'In That New World Which Is The Old' is remarkable for a novel simile in the octave.... 'Magellan' is rhythmically as fine as Joaquin Miller's celebrated 'Columbus,' and in quiet dignity much more satisfying.... 'Malcolm' is a narrative poem, finely movingly signaling the function of the tragedy of Love in the Restoration of Faith. Written in blank verse, iambic pentameter, the beauty of the poem, apart from its high spiritual dignity, lies in its refined diction and in its extraordinary imagery, whenever the poet wishes to enhance a sentiment or a vivid picture of reality. It has many fine lines and memorable metaphors.

'Compel Them To Come In'

I was a beggar of most evil fame,
Uncleanly, ragged, full of sores and scars:
Steeped in deceits and sunk in shame,
The hedge my bed and husks my daily bread,
Never a baser thing crept under Heaven's stars.

Before the palace of the King I strayed,
And saw the splendid casements filled with light.
A feast for the King's Son was made.
With sordid hate, I cursed their royal state,
Lifting my impious hands, out there in the black night.

A marvel then! I saw the doors wide swung,
And in a burst of light and joyous press
Of music on the darkness flung,
Straight to my place, with swift, composed pace,
The royal servants came, swift and with strong duress.

With strong duress unto the palace gate
They dragged my unwilling feet and held me fast.
Lo! there the Prince Himself did wait.
On my distress and ragged nakedness
He looked, and His gold-broidered cloke about me cast.

O dear compassion! Heavenly ruth! O true
And knightly deed that won my callous breast
To shame and love! In that high retinue
I stood with lowered brow. But the King said, 'Thou
Hast honour of my Son: henceforward be My guest!'

George A. Mackenzie

In That New World Which Is The Old

Once, like the Arab with his shifting tent
To some new shade of palms each day address,
My soul, a homeless wanderer, unblest,
Roamed all the realm of change, in purpose bent
To find a happier world, with banishment
Of that dull pain which drove away its rest.
Through fruitless years my soul pursued its quest,
Until with longing I was well-nigh spent.

And then I found God's Presence; and the ray
Of that mysterious dayspring, clear and sweet,
Touched all the common things of every day,
And there in house, and field, and in the street
From childhood trodden by my heedless feet,
The long-sought world in dewy freshness lay.

George A. Mackenzie

Magellan

There is no change upon the deep:
To-day they see the prospect wide
Of yesterday; the same waves leap;
The same pale clouds the distance hide,
Or shaped to mountain-peaks their hopes of land deride.

On and still on the soft winds bear
The rocking vessel, and the main
That is so pitiless and so fair,
Seems like a billowy, boundless plain
Where one might sail, and sail, and ever sail in vain.

Famine is there with haggard cheek,
And fever stares from hollow eyes;
And sullen murmurs rise, that speak
Curses on him whose mad emprise
Has lured men from their homes to die 'neath alien skies.

But he, the captain, he is calm;
His glance compels the mutineer;
In fainting hearts he pours the balm
Of sympathy, and lofty cheer:
'Courage! a few more leagues will prove the earth a sphere.

'The world is round: there is an end;
We do not vainly toil and roam;
The kiss of wife, the clasp of friend,
The fountains and the vines of home,
Wait us beyond the cloud, beyond the edge of foam.'

George A. Mackenzie

My Baby Sleeps

The wind is loud in the west to-night,
But Baby sleeps;
The wild wind blows with all its might,
But Baby sleeps;
My Baby sleeps, and he does not hear
The noise of the storm in the pine trees near.

The snow is drifting high to-night,
But Baby sleeps;
The bitter world is cold and white,
But Baby sleeps;
My Baby sleeps, so fast, so fast,
That he does not heed the wintry blast.

The cold snows drift, and the wild winds rave,
But Baby sleeps;
And a white cross stands by his little grave,
While Baby sleeps;
And the storm is loud in the rocking pine,
But its moan is not so deep as mine.

George A. Mackenzie

The Sleep That Flits On Baby's Eyes

The sleep that flits on baby's eyes,
Whence does it come? Can you surmise?
Yes! in a cool, deep forest glade,
Where glowworms dimly light the shade,
They tell of a fairy village shy,
Where two enchanted buds hang high;
Thence, borne by fairy fingers, flies
The sleep that kisses baby's eyes.

The smile in his sleep, that will twinkle and go—
Where was it born? Pray, do you know?

Yes! for a rumour floats about—
A rumour—its truth I dare not doubt—

That a crescent moon, with a pale, young ray
Touched a cloudlet's edge, ere it melted away,
And there, in the dream of a dew-washed morn,
Baby's flickering smile was born.

And where was it hidden—that soft, fresh glow
On baby's limbs? Does any one know?

Yes! in a day that is long since fled,
Ere baby's mother was grown and wed,
With the first sweet dawning of love, it stole
Into the depths of her dreaming soul,
And there lay hidden—the soft, fresh rose
That now on the limbs of baby glows.

George A. Mackenzie

To A Humming-Bird

Thou vagrant melody, light crown
Of rainbow mist above the flower,
Rifler, with touch like thistledown,
Of blooms that meekly yield their dower
Of sweets to thy soft and yet imperious power,

Gay, flashing, flickering, fairy thing,
Embodied zephyr, shimmering sound,
Whence hast thou come on gauzy wing
To my straight plot of city ground?
Whence hast thou come and whither art thou bound?

Hast thou been where the Northern wave
Breaks half the year on coasts of snow?
Hast thou flashed on the dreary cave
Of the squat, stolid Eskimo
With the keen splendour of thy tropic glow?

And now, thy merry summer jaunt
Completed, dost thou wisely fare
Homeward, to some safe jungle haunt,
Whither 'mid close-locked boughs repair
Strange feathered things of plumage rich and rare?

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I marvel at thy countless leagues
Of travel; how, secure from harm,
Thou bravest perils and fatigues;
I marvel how thy tiny form
Weathers the drenching rain, the driving storm.

Thou art fled! my garden seems bereft
Of all its beauty! yet some sense
Of joy and blessing thou hast left
Behind thee, as a recompense,
Which shall remain when thou art flown far hence.

A sense of joy, that He whose hand

Shaped thee and all things sweet and fair,
Hath pleasure in the thing He planned;
A sense of trust, in Him whose care
Pilots thy course through the uncharted air.

George A. Mackenzie